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RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS BREEDING IN BERKELEY AQUATIC PARK

During the period March 1940 to March 1941 a daily count was made of the Red-winged Blackbirds in the Berkeley Aquatic Park area, an artificial estuary of the bay about a mile long and several hundred yards wide, with brackish water whose level is controlled by gates. It is surrounded by roads, lawns and ornamental shrub plantings and a narrow growth of cattails and willows, covering in all about 1000 sq. yards. The ten years from 1940 to 1950 have seen many changes in the landscape of the San Francisco Bay area, some of which have affected the habits and distribution of birds. The Berkeley Aquatic Park has, in itself, remained essentially unchanged. Its most noticeably altered aspect is the vastly increased amount of noise due to the great increase of traffic on the railroad lines and highways which surround the park. Nevertheless, the Red-winged Blackbird population is today very nearly the same as it was ten years ago.

Reviewing the 1940-1941 records we find: there were no blackbirds in the park area from 1 to 20 January; from 20 to 30 January there was an occasional individual; throughout February an average of two birds per day were seen; from 1 to 10 March, there were noted 3 birds a day on the average; and from 11 March to 10 June never less than 4 birds a day (the average being 6 per day); from 11 June to 20 July the average number dropped off to between 3 and 4; in the period 20 July to 1 August there were no blackbirds in the park at all; from 1 August to 31 December occasional flocks of individuals were noted, but most days show no records of these birds being present. It should be added that the first young bird out of the nest was noted on 27 April.

From the foregoing data it appears that the park was used by the blackbirds as a breeding area from February to July, April 27 being not only the date of appearance of the first young out of the nest but also the approximate chronological mid-point of the breeding period. The complete absence of the birds in their accustomed reed-beds in the period 20 July to 1 August indicates that the breeding group withdrew abruptly at that time. The species not being migratory in the San Francisco Bay area, it appears that they simply moved away from the

Aquatic Park when they were no longer tied to it by the necessities of rearing young. The occurrence of occasional individuals and flocks from August to December suggests that the species adopts wandering habits during this period. It also appears that the aquatic park environment is not sufficiently attractive to hold the blackbirds for any length of time during the non-breeding period, even though it is obviously adequate to the needs of rearing young.

It has not been possible to make a daily check of the park in 1950. However, at least once a week during the breeding season and up to the present time (10 November 1950) these birds have been counted. The pattern is essentially the same as it was in 1940 to 1941. The figures indicate an average increase in one or two pairs of birds, and a shift in the location of the breeding area from the so-called KRE pond adjacent to the park to a point close to the railroad tracks about 200 yards north of the pond. The birds *appear* not to be affected by the constant noise on the tracks. Nevertheless, they moved from the park on or about 18 June, which is approximately three weeks earlier than in 1940. An examination of the day to day fluctuation in numbers and location of individuals strongly suggests that the biological necessity to remain in the breeding area terminates in early June (as indicated in 1950) rather than in early July (as indicated in 1940). Perhaps the increased congestion and traffic in the area rendered it less attractive in 1950, and the birds did not delay their departure into vagrancy beyond the limit of necessity. As the area under study will doubtless become more and more congested as time goes on, it may be possible to watch the situation change still further and in more detail. It may also be possible to describe more precisely the extent of time which the birds require to be in residence on the breeding area for purposes of reproduction.

— DAVID G. NICHOLS, *Berkeley, California*

OBSERVATIONS. Edited by Junea W. Kelly. 3 Great gray owls, Nov. 4 Yosemite Park, Harry Adamson; Ferruginous rough-leg hawk, Mt. Blvd near Redwood Canyon Rd., Oakland, Nov. 8, Ethel Richardson; 250 Yellow-billed magpie, 2 Say phoebe, Calaveras Reservoir, Oct. 29; 3 Vaux swift, Pt. Reyes, Oct. 15, Kenneth Schulz; 3 male and 1 female wood duck, Chain of Lakes, Golden Gate Park, Nov. 19, Junea W. Kelly.

NEW MEMBERS: We welcome the following: from San Francisco, Miss Gertrude Dowdall, Miss Josephine Hill, Miss Dorothy Morris, Mrs. Inez A. Williams, from Oakland, Miss Edith Garner, Mr. Franklin T. Peck, Miss Barbara B. Totheroh.

CONSERVATION NOTE: The ivory-billed woodpecker, "the rarest living species of American bird" has a protected habitat now, the Chipola River Wildlife Sanctuary in Florida, largely through efforts of the National Audubon Society.

NOVEMBER—JOICE ISLAND—TRIP

On Sunday, November 19th, sixty-six members of the Sacramento and Golden Gate Audubon Societies and guests journeyed to the State operated Suisun Waterfowl Refuge on Joice Island. Two boat loads took the seven mile trip to the refuge. Mild weather prevailed with the sun appearing in the morning and no rain. Laurence Curl and Howard Cogswell led the six mile hike along the levees. Highlights included 1000 white-fronted geese, 2500 snow geese, and 13 white-tailed kites. All appreciated the efforts of Ross McFadyen in planning this splendid field trip. The following sixty-seven species were observed:

Horned, eared, pied-bld. grebe; wh. pelican; double-cr. cormorant; gr. bl. heron; Amer., snowy egret; bk-cr. heron; Amer. bittern; whistling swan; Canada, wh-fronted, snow goose; mallard; gadwell; baldpate; pintail; green-wg., cinnamon teal; shoveller; canvas-back; greater & lesser scaup; Amer. golden-eye; buffle-head ruddy duck; turkey vulture; wh.-tld. kite; red-tld., marsh, sparrow hawk; ring-n. pheasant; Virginia, sora rail; Florida gallinule; coot; killdeer; gr. yellow-legs; avocet; glaucous-wg., Herring, Calif., ring-bl., short-bl., Bonaparte gull; barn, short-eared owl; bltd. kingfisher; red-sh. flicker; bk. phoebe; horned lark; tree swallow; marsh wren; water pipit; loggerhead shrike; Audubon warbler; yellow-throat; house sparrow; west. meadowlark; red-wg.; Brewer blackbird; house finch; Amer. goldfinch; sp. towhee; wh-cr. and song sparrow.

— GEORGE TREICHEL, *Historian*

OCTOBER—LAKE MERCED—TRIP

Despite the prediction of a wet day, October 28 trip was taken in dry comfort with no wind. Four members met at the Zoo entrance, walked to the beach and watched three groups of sanderlings feeding back and forth just ahead of the breakers. Near the Fort Funston gates, a golden eagle was soaring leisurely, low enough to obtain good detail in configuration and plumage. It appeared to be an immature bird well advanced toward maturity. Mr. Sather and his telescope were helpful in confirming identification. The last San Francisco record of this bird was reported by Gordon Bolander at Lake Merced, January 5, 1938, an immature specimen. On September 23, 1933, an immature bird was reported by Carl Smith on a pole at Leavenworth St. and Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco.

Also near Fort Funston we saw four large formations of ducks or geese in flight, too far away for identification.

The following 31 species were recorded, representing 18 families:

Eared grebe; Mallard, baldpate, lesser scaup, ruddy; golden eagle; sparrow hawk; California quail; sora rail; coot; sanderling; west., Calif., Heerman, Bonaparte gull; Anna hummingbird; Red-sh. flicker; black phoebe; Ch.-bk. chickadee; bushtit; robin; Hutton vireo; Audubon warbler; house sparrow; Brewer blackbird; towhee; Oro. junco; golden-cr., white-cr., fox-sparrow.

E. A. Mayers, Leader and Historian

DECEMBER MEETING

The 399th meeting of the Golden Gate Audubon Society will be a dinner meeting at the New Rex resaurant, 401 Broadway near Columbus Ave. in San Francisco at 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 14th. Mr. Laurence Curi will preside. An invitation has been extended to the Sequoia and Santa Clara Audubon Societies.

Reports will be made by each Society of their activities during the year, which should result in a helpful exchange of ideas between Bay Area branches of National Audubon.

Dr. Eric Reynolds will lead a discussion on conservation of natural areas of San Francisco Bay Shore Region.

Mr. Howard Cogswell will point out location of desireable conservation areas.

Mrs. Reynolds will show her film of shore birds of Bay Farm Island.

Return the enclosed card promptly to Mrs. Myer as reservations are limited. The dinner is \$2.00 which includes tip and tax.

Mr. Arthur Myer asks for volunteers for the Christmas Bird' Census, December 24th. Phone BE. 7-3080.

SACRAMENTO MIGRATORY WATERFOWL REFUGE near Willows, and the Grey Lodge Refuge near Gridley December 2 and 3. On Saturday, December 2, meet at 10:30 at the observation tower at the refuge headquarters on the east side of route 99W about 8 miles south of Willows. Overnight accommodations are available nearby at Willows, Gridley and Marysville. On Sunday, Dec. 3, meet at the post office in Gridley at 9:00 or join the party later at the **GREY LODGE REFUGE**. If you can't come up for the week-end try to come up for one day. Bring plenty of warm clothes as it will be colder than in the Bay area. Leader, Harry Adamson.

DECEMBER MARIN LAKES TRIP

On Sunday, December 17, to Ross, Marin Co. From San Francisco take the Greyhound bus at 7th and Mission at 7:55. Meet at the fire station in Ross at 9:00.

The area around Phoenix Lake will be visited, and for the more ambitious, Lake Lagunitas and possibly the new Bon Tempe Lake. This should be a good trip for some of the freshwater ducks such as Am. and hooded mergansers. Bring lunch, bin.oculars, telescope and interested friends.

A. Laurence Curi
Chairman, Field Trips Committee

Golden Gate Audubon Society

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

Branch of National Audubon Society

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Monthly meetings second Thursday, 7:30 p. m.

Assembly Room, San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Sts., San Francisco
Alternate months — Oakland.

Joint membership, Local & National \$5.00 per Year, includes Audubon Magazine